



Representative Mark Ericks

1st Legislative District

Winter 2005



Dear Friends,

As a newly-elected representative from our 1st Legislative District, it's a pleasure – and an honor – to represent you in the Washington State House of Representatives.

As you know, we are at a critical juncture in our state's history and there are numerous issues that need our entire attention.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the 2005 legislative session will be well underway. We're facing numerous challenges: a huge budget shortfall, persistent traffic gridlock, rising prescription drug costs, necessary election reforms and many others. However, I am confident that we will tackle these problems in a manner consistent to our values.

Our primary responsibility this year is to write a two-year budget for our state. We must bridge a wide gap in the state treasury between the revenue we bring in and the needed investments in education, health care and social services that the citizens of our state depend on.

And as a new Legislator, each day brings a better understanding of how it does – or doesn't – work in state government. I intend to pass what I've learned on to you, so that we can all understand the ins and outs of state government a little better.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, or my Legislative Assistant, Amanda Emerson, at any time with your feedback as we move forward in dealing with the current needs of our state.

Sincerely,

Mark

Representative

Mark Ericks

1st. Legislative District
332 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7900

E-mail:

ericks.mark@leg.wa.gov

Committees:

Technology, Energy &
Communications

Capital Budget

Financial Institutions &
Insurance (Vice Chair)

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Send me an e-mail (ericks.mark@leg.wa.gov) so I can add you to my list and you'll receive legislative news from my computer to yours every week. It saves money on postage and keeps you informed about everything that's happening under the dome. You can unsubscribe at any time and your e-mail address will not be shared with anyone else.

The Budget: pinching pennies

As of early February it was estimated that we will need approximately \$2 billion more than we expect to have available just to maintain existing programs and services. These are funds that do things like:

- Provide health care for thousands of families.
- Teach a million students.
- Keep families safe.

These are programs and services that most citizens want their state to provide. I plan to take a tough look at all of our state programs to see where we might be able to save money. It is imperative that we find a way to get Washington back on track.

Whatever decisions are made under the Capitol dome, be assured that any new budget we ultimately support must:

- Give young people the opportunity to achieve their goals.
- Support working families.
- Let seniors have the resources they need to live comfortably.



Education + Jobs + Health care=SUCCESS

How can we make our state a better place for you to live, work and raise a family?

I believe it's our duty to build a better Washington for our children and grandchildren.

- Better schools and universities;
- Better jobs; and
- Better health care.

Politicians get frequently caught up in partisan bickering. I believe we should focus on the basics – education, jobs and health care – because we're all affected by those issues. So this session I'm working with Republicans and Democrats on bold reforms to improve our schools, create good jobs and fix the broken health-care system.



Jobs:

Washington is a great place to do business, but too often small business owners have to jump too many hurdles to succeed. I am working hard to eliminate the red tape so that small businesses have the opportunity to grow.

Education:

The first step in making Washington a great place to do business is to make smart investments in our workforce and our education system. I have asked businesses across the state what their top priority is—their answer is consistent: An educated workforce.

The grim facts:

Only 66% of our kids graduate from high school in 4 years. 25% drop out completely. The drop out rate is closer to 50% for Hispanic and Native American kids; 52% for African American kids, and 70% for foster kids.

On top of that, recent numbers show that Washington State ranks 42nd out of 50 states in per-student funding.

We must do better. Our Constitution establishes that education is the paramount duty of Washington state. I'll make sure our budget reflects this principle.



Health Care:

You've probably heard about the idea to import prescription drugs from Canada. I think it's time we stop talking about it and start to actually do it. We can get the same exact medicines for half or a third of the price. Why should taxpayers and patients pay more?

But reducing the costs of drugs isn't enough; we need health coverage for everyone, especially children and seniors. We're one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Why can't we make sure our children see doctors and get the care they need to be healthy?

We can do better.





Holding government and businesses accountable: say goodbye to giveaways!

Early into this session we have already passed two pieces of legislation that were much needed in our state.

One of them requires independent performance audits of all state agencies and operations. It also creates a Citizen Oversight Board to evaluate fiscal efficiency, program effectiveness, and customer satisfaction.

The second one requires reviews of all existing tax breaks -or preferences. Let's face it: the only way we can improve a tax break is by knowing how it's working out.

Both bills are now on their way to the Senate. I voted in favor of these measures because I believe state government must be accountable and do everything possible to ensure we are using taxpayer dollars effectively.

Our state keeps about 500 tax exemptions on the books. They were originally granted to encourage economic development — and the good-paying jobs that go with it. These exemptions can benefit the state economy by promoting new industry and prosperity for the general public. But without oversight and accountability they could become nothing more than a government subsidy —a giveaway- of failing and mismanaged businesses. A subsidy you and I -- as taxpayers -- pay for.

Reviewing all tax preferences will help us determine if we're really getting our end of the bargain. Washington taxpayers deserve to know:

- Who's directly affected?
- How much does it cost?
- What has it achieved?

Because accountability is a two-way street and the businesses that get tax breaks must also be held accountable. A company should be able to demonstrate that it's putting the additional money to good, productive use by creating good, productive jobs.



TOWN HALL MEETINGS March 19, 2005:

Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe
Rep. Al O'Brien
Rep. Mark Ericks

MLT Library

10:00 to 11:30 AM

23300 58th Avenue West
Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043

Northshore Adult Day Center

from 1:00 to 2:30 PM

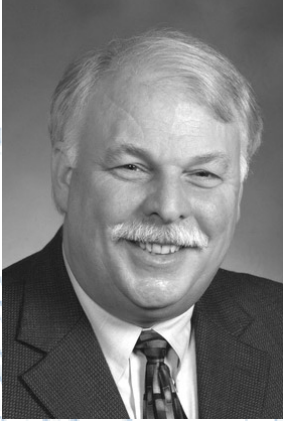
9929 NE 180th
Bothell, WA 98011

Cathcart Elementary School Library

from 3:30 to 5:00 PM

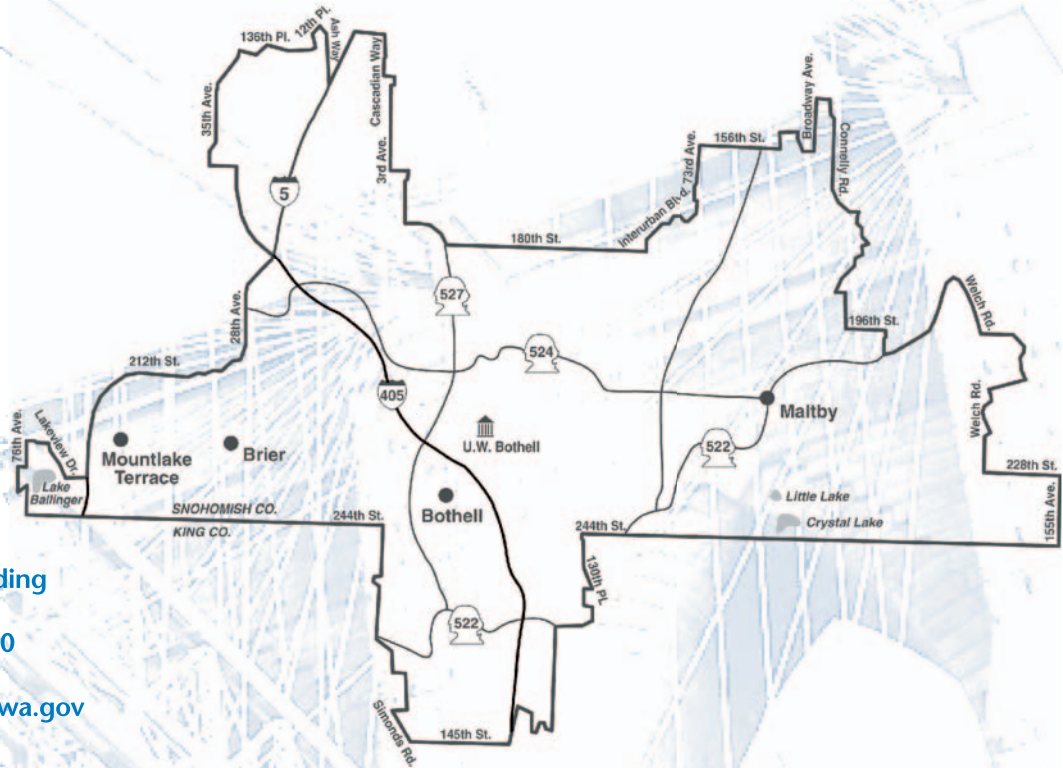
8201 188th Ave. SE,
Snohomish, WA

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332 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7900
E-mail: ericks.mark@leg.wa.gov



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